

The Return

Edward Hamlin

For my wife, Paula

i.

In sleep we feel the dawn arrive
and creep down to the dock
to stand in the mist rising
from the flank of the water

The lake passive, quelled,
yesterday's heat bleeding out
as if from a dying tern

But this illusion of death
is only sleep
and the smudge of a distant, broken wing
only the vague stand of poplar
crouched on the far shore

ii.

The outline of years
clarifies gracefully,
unhurried and precise
despite our reckless need
to know everything in advance

Daughters who may come
to wake us in our bed

Voices we will recognize
on the evidence of a single word

Hibiscus we will greet over coffee
in some unknown garden

as another day of unfamiliar dimension
resolves from dreaming
to take shape in the lithe June sun

We mark the years mechanically
but the real progress of time
is this slow knowing
of who we are
despite who we meant to be,
of who we are
yet who we are to become

To begin the journey again
with you, year after year:

To return to the trail head
The pier of departure
The first bend in the river
The steady, safe base camp
Rooted to the knee of the mountain

This is the friable matter of love

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